

## What is a snake bite?

A snake bite occurs when a snake uses its fangs to inject snake venom directly into a person. Each year in Australia about 600 people are bitten by snakes, with between 200 and 500 of these people needing treatment with anti-venom.

Deaths from snake bite are very rare.

Sometimes there are obvious bite marks, but not always. If it is unclear whether you have been bitten by a snake, the safest option is to go to hospital where you can be checked for signs of venom in your system.

## What are the symptoms?

Most snake bites do not deliver enough venom to cause major problems. If venom does enter your system, its effect will depend on the type of snake that bit you.

Symptom of snake bite can include:

- sudden collapse or convulsion, usually within an hour of the bite
- double vision, or blurred vision
- excessive bleeding
- sore muscles, either near the bite or all over the body
- muscle weakness and, in severe cases, paralysis
- muscle breakdown, which can lead to kidney damage
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- abdominal pain
- sweating
- headache.

Your doctor will ask you about the circumstances of your snake bite, whether you have experienced any symptoms, and examine you, particularly for paralysis around the eyes.

Because it can take some time for the venom to have an impact, you will be kept in hospital and observed for about 12 hours from the time you were bitten and have blood tests to rule out any abnormal bleeding.

## Treatment

You may be given anti-venom to counteract the snake bite. If so, you will be admitted to hospital so the doctor can closely monitor your condition.

The type of anti-venom selected will depend on the snakes found in the area where you were bitten and your symptoms.

In Victoria, most venomous snakes are from the brown or tiger snake groups. If there is doubt about the type of snake that bit you, you may be given a dose of both anti-venoms.

Anti-venom can cause an allergic reaction and is only given to patients who clearly need it. If you need anti-venom, your doctor will talk to you about the benefits and potential side-effects.

Patients treated with anti-venom are closely monitored in hospital, where there is ready access to treatment if an allergic reaction occurs.

If you have symptoms of snake bite, your risk of having an allergic reaction to the anti-venom is lower than the risk of having untreated venom in your system.

## Seeking help



If you are bitten by a snake use first aid treatment (immobilise the affected limb and apply a pressure bandage) and go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



Contact the **Victorian Poisons Information Centre** – Phone 13 11 26



## Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the **Better Health Channel**  
[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

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